

VZCZCXRO3668
PP RUEHTRO
DE RUEHAS #0437/01 1121605
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 211605Z APR 08
FM AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5646
INFO RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT 2296
RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS 7149

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ALGIERS 000437

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA DAS KENT PATTON
TUNIS FOR MEPI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/21/2028
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [AG](#)
SUBJECT: PREPARING THE WAY FOR THE 2009 PRESIDENTIAL
ELECTION IN ALGERIA

REF: A. 07 ALGIERS 1749
[1](#)B. 07 ALGIERS 716

Classified By: Ambassador Robert S. Ford; reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Algeria is scheduled to hold its next presidential election in April 2009. Parliamentary and local elections in 2007 saw very low turnout and our contacts warn us of broad disinterest in the political system. In order to help avoid radicalization of some elements of the disenchanted here, we recommend steps to make the election process more open and hence more credible. Election monitoring will be an important component of the process. The Algerian government has already dismissed a proposal for international monitors from the European Union, and has become publicly sensitive to the issue since a prominent opposition leader formally called for international observers during a recent visit to the U.S. It thus appears unlikely that the government will permit a meaningful international observation effort. A substantive and well planned domestic observation effort remains the best hope to inject legitimacy into a flawed process. Algerian electoral law limits the right to observe elections to "candidates' representatives." Given that, U.S. support for the election monitoring effort should be focused on training a spectrum of political parties to improve their monitoring capacity. This cable describes how we might best leverage our resources to provide technical assistance in the area of election monitoring in preparation for the 2009 presidential elections in Algeria. END SUMMARY.

WHAT WE'D LIKE

[1](#)2. (C) A perfect Algerian presidential election would look something like this:

-- Several hundred independent international election monitors would be deployed in Algeria to observe the 2009 presidential election campaign and, importantly, to observe the actual vote tabulations and certifications;

-- At least ten thousand trained Algerian election observers from political parties, with the ability to observe vote counts and certifications and a capacity to relay observations up their parties' hierarchies, also would be deployed;

-- The media would have broad access during the entire process; and

-- An independent election commission would be formed, providing a forum for challenges and redress regarding polling station irregularities and inconsistencies between

official and observer vote counts.

In contrast to this ideal, the May 2007 elections involved no international observers; party representatives were permitted to observe voting and on-site vote tabulation, but none were allowed to observe the crucial tally compilation process, and observation was not uniform across the country; media access was restricted. There was an election monitoring commission composed of political party representatives, but it did nothing. In addition to these shortcomings, for the November 2007 local elections the government opted not even to create an electoral commission (ref A).

WHAT WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO GET

13. (C) Democracy promotion is a challenge generally in Algeria, and lately election monitoring has become a particularly sensitive subject. The European Union sounded out the government privately on the idea of an international observer effort in 2009 and was brusquely rebuffed. Any similar suggestion from us would be greeted even less enthusiastically. Absent broad-based and coordinated support across Algeria's political spectrum for such observers, it is highly unlikely the government will agree. So far only one opposition leader -- the RCD's Said Sadi -- has publicly advocated international observers, and he chose to do so during a visit to North America. His call fell largely flat here because parties believe they can cut backroom deals with "le Pouvoir" and get acceptable vote shares. This may not change during 2008: President Bouteflika has not yet announced whether he will stand for reelection, and the parties will not act until he does. Thus, at this point we do not believe it is likely that a groundswell of political

ALGIERS 00000437 002 OF 003

support for international observers will build inside Algeria in 2008.

14. (C) If the U.S. wants to contribute positively to the 2009 electoral process in Algeria, we should focus our attention on domestic observers. The primary focus of training must be on Algerian political parties across the spectrum, rather than on NGOs or civil society, because the parties are the only organizations with a legal right to engage in polling station monitoring (ref B). Given the vast difference in human and financial resources between the ruling National Liberation Front (FLN) and smaller opposition parties like the Socialist Forces Front (FFS), election monitoring by political parties often reinforces the advantages of the ruling coalition. Our effort should therefore include strategies for the smaller parties to concentrate their limited observer capacity and cooperate in ways that will maximize their limited effectiveness. Because of the large number of polling stations, poll monitor coordinators must be trained to identify key electoral areas and target high-density voting districts to draw a statistically relevant sample of vote counts that can force the GoA to respond if the overall vote counts are falsified.

15. (C) In addition to watching people cast their votes, party representatives should also observe the election campaign to determine how freely and fairly the Ministry of Interior operates. Observers should also watch vote counts and certifications. Training for them in the lead-up to the elections should include encouragement to the parties to make a concerted push in advance of the voting for the right to observe tabulation and certification. Similar encouragement should be made for parties to call on the government well in advance of the polls to create an independent electoral commission to monitor the process.

WHAT WE SHOULD DO

16. (C) USG resources are limited, and Algeria is a large

country. Our approach to observer training thus needs to be as focused and large-scale as practicable. We propose to minimize the number of one-off programs funded in favor of a single program of sufficient breadth and depth. The legal limits of who can be a poll observer in Algeria dictate that we not waste resources on programs for civil society representatives who ultimately will not be eligible for accreditation as poll watchers. We believe that an observer-training program by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) could provide the best option for observer training, if the program is designed to be Algeria-specific and takes place in Algeria over a sustained period of time leading up to and including the actual election. The program should be structured to include a train-the-trainers element so as to maximize the number of observers trained. Ideally we should aim to train, either directly to indirectly, at least ten thousand Algerians. Recent experience in legislative and local elections has also shown us that it is important to have trainers on the ground during the campaign season to identify irregularities in the voter-list process.

¶7. (C) There is, of course, no guarantee that the Algerian authorities will permit a U.S.-based implementer like NDI to carry out an observer training program here. The Department is aware of the difficulties NDI has experienced here in the past. Therefore, we urge the implementer to have a contingency plan, such as hosting the training in Morocco if the Algerian government refuses visas for trainers. By necessity, the number of people trained will decrease if that occurs, so the contingency plan should include a broader train-the-trainer element.

COMMENT

¶8. (C) After being rebuffed on an offer of election observers by the Algerian government, the head of the EU delegation in Algiers told us that election monitoring is not high on their agenda. An open election campaign and credible and transparent elections process is critical for Algeria, however, to avoid a situation in which the Algerian electorate abandons hope in a democratic approach to improving their lives.

¶9. (C) We can expect some major GOA pushback on this. Already, the government has fired warning shots at us through press leaks about alleged American interference in domestic

ALGIERS 00000437 003 OF 003

Algerian politics. The Said Sadi visit, during which he accented the need for international observers given the problems of the election process, hit a raw nerve here. Given Algerian government sensitivities to foreign involvement in their election process, and the lack of broad public support for it, our approach to monitoring efforts will need to be delicate to avoid adverse effects on the bilateral relationship. If we base the program firmly in Algerian electoral law and are careful to ensure that the entire spectrum of political parties has access to the training, we should be able to limit -- but not eliminate -- government complaint.

FORD